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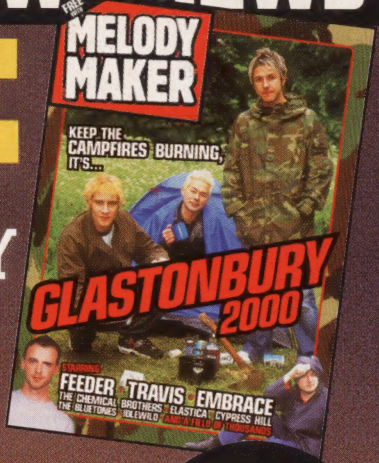

STAR-STUDDED **88** PAGE ISSUE

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"WE'RE NOT SO UPTIGHT NOW..."

RADIOHEAD

THOM YORKE'S HAPPY RETURN

8-PAGE CLASSIC GLASTONBURY PHOTO SUPPLEMENT

SPANISH BUMS: **IAN WATSON** (WORDS) & **STEPHEN SWEET** (PICS)

OK CAT

MOST EAGERLY AWAITED COMEBACK OF THE YEAR? THAT'LL BE **RADIOHEAD**'S EUROPEAN TOUR, THEN. WE MEET THE BAND AND FANS ABROAD. . . AND HEAR THE NEW SONGS

MARTA has been waiting for this moment for over two years now. She's standing with her teenage friends in front of the ornate Tivoli Theatre in her home town of Barcelona, waiting for a glimpse of "the best band in the whole world". She feels "nervous", partly at the prospect of talking to and touching the people who've affected her so deeply, but also because tonight they're due to play a handful of new songs and she desperately doesn't want to be let down. The last three albums were "incredible", and anything less from the latest offering will be a crushing disappointment.

Her first glimpse of Thom Yorke makes her brain spin. She starts to go a bit woozy with excitement, loses it a little, but then she gathers herself together and leaps forward to say hello. The vibes, it has to be said, aren't great. Thom seems withdrawn, uncomfortable, the anxious recluse of legend. When she tells him that she thinks he's the greatest artist she knows and he says, "No, I'm just one of a lot of good artists", she begins to panic. But then she remembers. She thought meeting this particular person might not be that easy, so she brought something with her to smooth things over.

"I have a present for you!" Marta squeals at her idol.

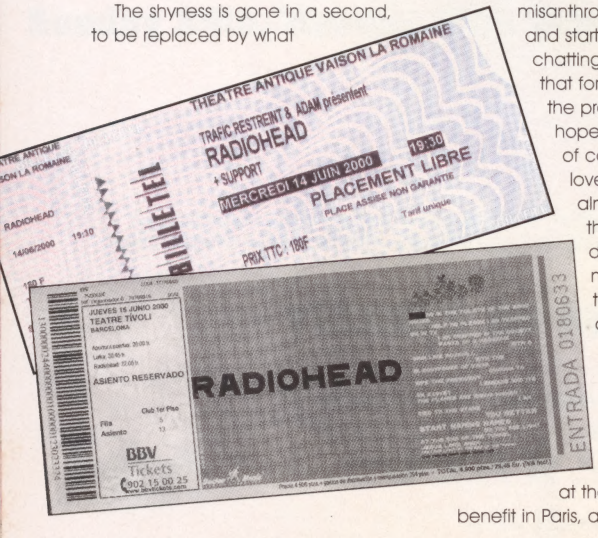
Thom hunches his shoulders, embarrassed into silence.

"It's a bottle of champagne from this region," she smiles. "Called Cava."

The shyness is gone in a second, to be replaced by what can only be described as simple, unaffected excitement.

"I know it! I know it!" Thom beams, cheerily accepting the gift. "Thank you very much."

And then the truly unexpected happens. The singer best-known for his angst-ridden, almost misanthropic lyrics, loosens up and starts to shoot the breeze, chatting about the downpour that forced them to cancel the previous night's gig, his hopes for that evening, and, of course, his new-found love for Cava. You'd almost be forgiven for thinking that this is the demeanour of a happy man. A man who's in the process of putting an awful lot behind him.



THE two weeks leading up to Radiohead's first live performances since their triumphant show at the Amnesty International benefit in Paris, at the end of 1998, are awash with whispers and speculation. One story reckons the band were hugely affected by a documentary they saw in September last year about the story of hip-hop, and had followed in Public Enemy producer Hank Shocklee's footsteps when recording the new songs, keeping things fluid and experimental. "Thom's lyrics are more fragmental," confirms Colin, in an interview with Dutch magazine Oor at the start of June. "Some of the vocals are buried in the mix. We have tried new technologies, new sounds, new effects. In between the songs, there are electronic, ambient intermissions."

Elsewhere, there are mentions of jazz, a strange instrument called the martenot and admissions from the band that they hadn't picked up a guitar in weeks. "They are not songs in the traditional direction," is Ed's take on it. "We've closed a chapter with 'OK Computer'. It would have been ridiculous to continue like that. If we had continued like that, we would be 'dead' in 35 years. Bowie, in the Seventies, was a reference, and it's to that we aspire. He did not stop composing, he changed his style continuously."

No one's exactly sure how Radiohead have moved on stylistically, but nearly every snippet of speculation about the return of the most creative band of the late 20th century concludes that the new material can only be "dark and moody".

Go on the Internet with the help of Napster, however, and the unreleased Radiohead songs you'll find tell a totally different story. Instead of violent beats and extreme, fuzzed-up cacophonies, there are slight, haunting melodies and lyrics that veer from the disgust and self-hatred we know all so well to moments of tenderness and love. "True Love Waits" is sweet and wistful, a spiralling keyboard refrain that elicits feelings of comfort, hope and commitment. "I Promise" has pain and depression lurking in the background, but it's based around the twin pledges of *"I won't run away again/ I promise"* and *"Say my prayers every night"*. And "Lift", a classic Radiohead tale of claustrophobia in a modern building and, at one point, the belly of a whale, ends with the line *"Today is the first day of the rest of your days/So lighten up"*. Throw in Colin's recent assertion that Muse should "cheer up" and you suddenly have a very different picture.

What is certain is that Radiohead will be using these dates to test the 26 new songs they have written, to see how they grow in a live environment, which songs go down well with the diehard fans and perhaps to use these reactions to help select which songs make it on to their fourth album. "It is a testing ground," confirms Steve Lamacq, who's officially here on holiday, but was tempted back on duty by the prospect of hearing new Radiohead songs.

"They may be pushing as far as they can at the edges of the new songs to see what works. They can really work out how hard the songs can go." But will these dates include the orchestra or eight-piece brass section used on some new tracks? "It will be interesting to see the public's reaction," is all Ed has to say on the subject. "When we play the first new song, we'll be scared."

Time to hit the road.

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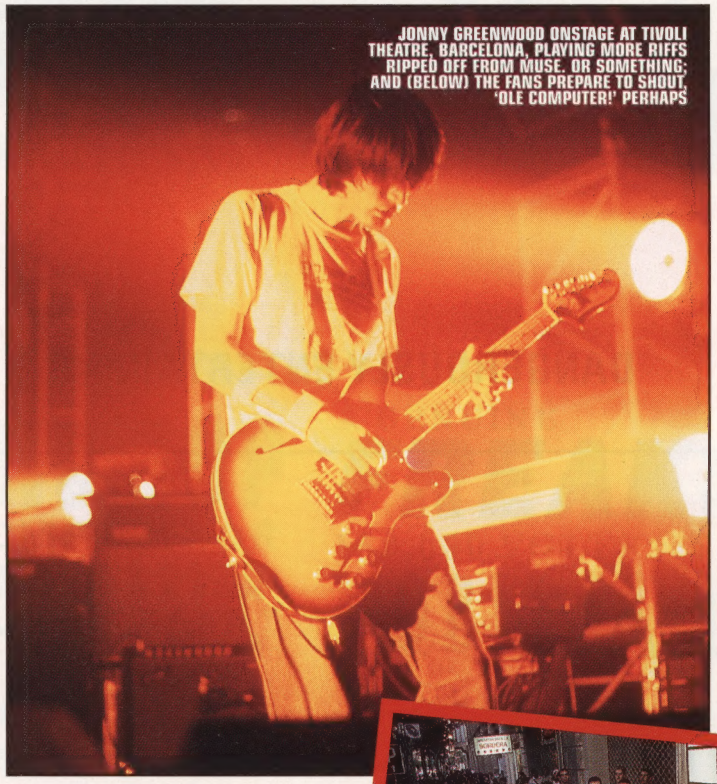
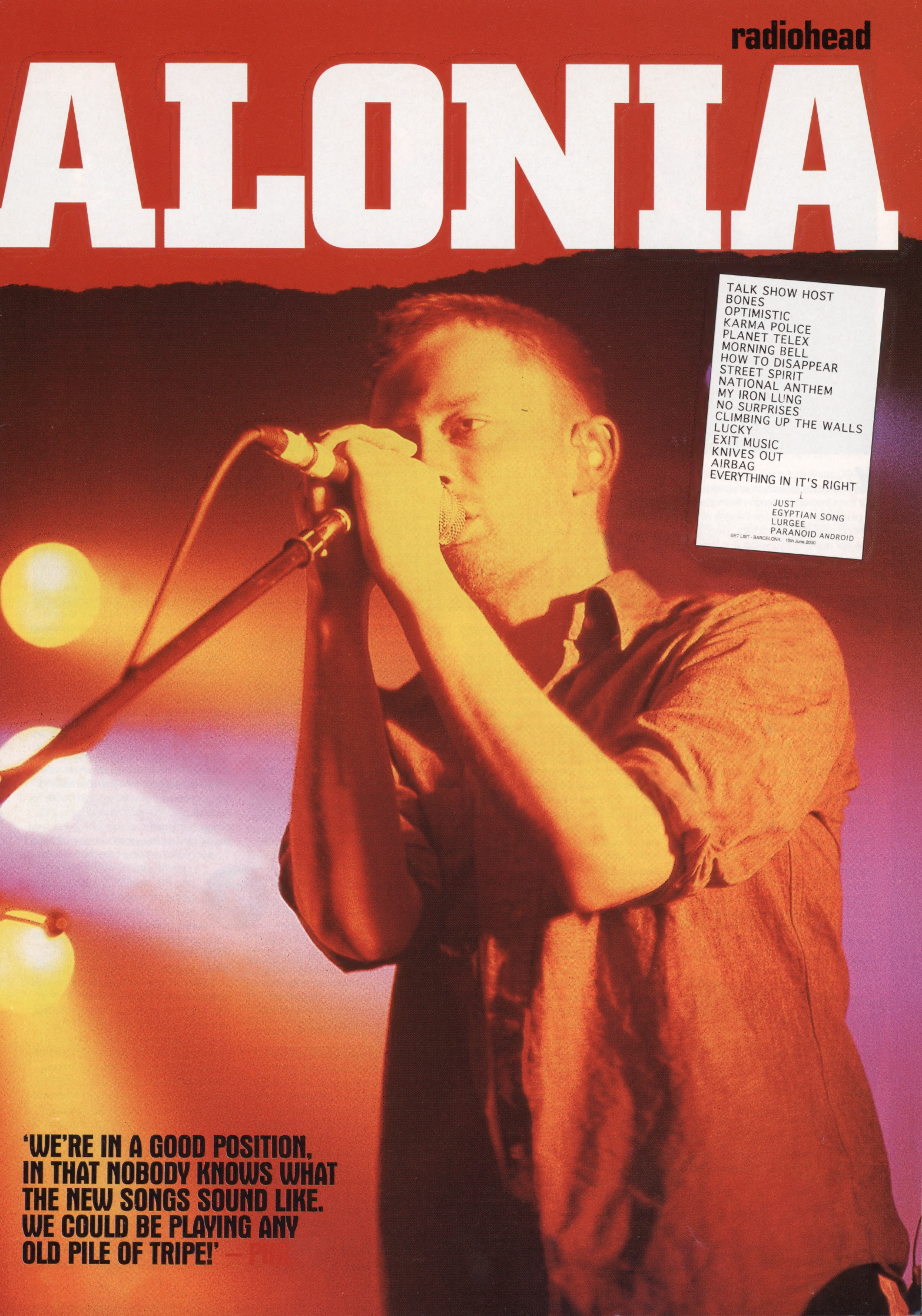


JONNY GREENWOOD ONSTAGE AT TIVOLI THEATRE, BARCELONA, PLAYING MORE RIFFS RIPPED OFF FROM MUSE. OR SOMETHING; AND (BELOW) THE FANS PREPARE TO SHOUT 'OLE COMPUTER!' PERHAPS

radiohead

ALONIA



'WE'RE IN A GOOD POSITION, IN THAT NOBODY KNOWS WHAT THE NEW SONGS SOUND LIKE. WE COULD BE PLAYING ANY OLD PILE OF TRIPE!'

radiohead

LIVE SHOW HOSTS (L-R): ED, COLIN, PHIL, THOM AND JONNY ONSTAGE IN BARCELONA

YOU don't find many town centres that boast a Roman amphitheatre, but then Radiohead aren't the types to plump for the obvious venues when thinking about a comeback. Hence their first date for two years is in Theatre Antique in Arles, an ancient amphitheatre that's been specially adapted for live performances. Two and a half thousand people flock to see the show, some taking advantage of tout tickets that are going for six quid a throw, and receive a soaking for their trouble, when a thunderstorm blows up out of nowhere.

The band wait for an hour for the storm to clear and, tipped off that another is on the way, run on to the open-air stage and manage to air just one new song, "Optimistic" (after which Thom declares "You like it dark, don't you?", just to keep the signals nice and mixed), before the lights fail for "Planet Telex", their fifth song. Lost in the emotion and caught in a truly glorious moment, the band keep on going, swathed in darkness as they move onto the other unheard song they also play in Barcelona, the magnificent "Morning Bell". It's this determination and strength of spirit that drives the experimental groove of "In Limbo" and keeps the storm clouds at bay. At least for 24 hours, anyway.

The next day, in another open-air Roman amphitheatre, the Theatre Antique in Vaison La Romane, they're not so lucky. It's relatively sunny until the soundcheck, when Thom spots the first dark cloud from the stage. The resulting deluge is almost Biblical in proportions, water running off the stage, over the electrical equipment, turning the roads into rivers and causing a regional power cut until 7pm that night. By 7.10, Radiohead managers Bryce and Brian decide to pull the show.

"It's one of those difficult decisions you have to make," says Brian, over dinner the next day in the Ramblas quarter of Barcelona. "Thirty years ago, there was a massive deluge there and 48 people were drowned, so the area's a bit prone to it. We've spent all day drying out the piano with a hairdryer because all the keys had stuck together. There's girls sitting there with multiple hairdryers! We've had hairdryers going over everything today trying to dry stuff out."

Won't the tent tour in September be subject to the same dangers?

"No. It's a big, closed circus tent. We'd have to be hit by a hurricane to be pulled over. The tent poles are sunk into the ground and it can't move. So that's not a worry. But we will be telling people to bring their own hairdryers!"

Righto. So, the big question: how's the new record sounding?

"It's another progression, another move forward for Radiohead," grins Brian. "It's lovely, a great piece of music. They never wanted to produce another 'OK Computer', they wanted to develop, create a challenge, so don't go into the record with any expectations about what their past history is about, go into it with an open mind."

Is it dark, as people are supposing?

"For me, personally, it's not dark. I'd say it's more enlightening. There's a pulse in the record. There's some tender stuff in there. But it's all done. The record's cut, finished. Ten tracks. And it'll be out some time in the autumn."

So are you trying to tell us Radiohead have, indeed, lightened up?

"Well, they're very excited, they're very happy, they love what they're doing, they're very happy to be on tour, very happy to be recording and making music, very happy with the state they're in. It's definitely a different tour to 'Meeting People Is Easy'. That was a bit dark."

OUTSIDE the Tivoli Theatre, the excitement is slowly building as the crowds start to gather. Outside the venue, there's nothing giving any indication that Radiohead are playing tonight, no poster, no sign, nothing, and the same goes for the rest of Barcelona. Nothing in the papers, one retrospective piece without interview in best-selling monthly Rock Deluxe, and that's it. So the kids who are here today are almost revelling in the sensation that they're in some kind of secret cult, a very passionate, fanatical secret cult.

"The tickets sold out here in five hours," says Juan Enrique, from Spain's premier online music mag, Indy Rock. "There are big expectations."

There's also a lot of knowledge about the band. Everyone we speak to today has Internet access and has downloaded tracks from Napster. This won't stop them from buying the new album when it comes out, it's just been fuelling their enthusiasm. "Thom Yorke is my favourite poet," says Fran from Malaga, while Lourdes from Majorca says she "is very excited because it's the first time I see them and they are my favourite band. I love the music. It's very emotional." Her pal, Marta, who we met earlier, is now almost beside herself. "We have front row tickets! I'm so excited!"

Steve Lamacq is grinning as well.

"I'm very excited about the whole thing," he says. "The venue is like the Oxford Apollo. Except in Barcelona. So it's like a little bit of home but here."

What do you expect of the new material?

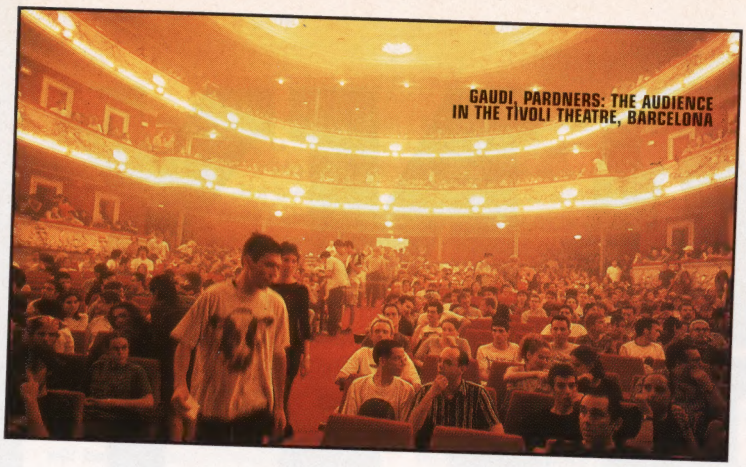
"I expect 'OK Computer' unravelled with more diverse influences. In the same way Blur went on to discover the different influences of different individual members after 'The Great Escape', I think that's where Radiohead are now. I certainly don't think it will be a harder-to-handle Radiohead album. There's no such thing. Radiohead albums are only hard if you make them hard yourself."

THE atmosphere in the beautifully preserved Tivoli Theatre is amazing, a real buzz of excitement that quickly turns to delirium when Radiohead launch into "Talk Show Host". Any thought of this being a band in the grip of darkness are dispelled straight away: Colin's practically bouncing on the spot, Ed actually executes two joyous scissorkick jumps during the evening and Thom's shaking his head like Stevie Wonder, lost in the instinctive beauty of the music. You feel like joining him as the realisation of what makes Radiohead magnificent redawns on you. This isn't simply despair at volume, these boys feel like they're taking rock into hyperspace and twisting it into exciting new shapes, finding the dimension to make guitars sound like mercury bubbling and choruses to soar to hitherto unknown heights.

What's really significant here, though, is that Radiohead are really having fun up there, rocking out to the Teenage Fanclub-style stomp of "Bones" in exactly the same way they did at the Amnesty International show when they rediscovered how to enjoy themselves. The Radiohead of yore wouldn't dare to have played the rock'n'roll ending that closes "Optimistic" or the funk guitar that keeps the voodoo atmosphere rattling along with a swing in its step. There's a definite swamp feel to this song, and the delirium-at-a-price tone of the lyrics add to the "dark" feel, but there's a bone-rattling party going on here too, as "the sophisticated people of Barcelona" (Thom, the silver-tongued charmer) will attest, as they shake their hips with glee.

"Karma Police" is magnificent of course, a reminder to the copyists that the moments of beauty, the bits where you feel you could float off into the heavens as you sing along, are just as important as the angst. Jonny hammers the hairdryer-ed piano like a demonic Jools Holland, bringing – yes! – a strung-out boogie feel to the song and you're still shaking your head in bemusement when Thom chirps, "Ever get the feeling you're in a film?" He gestures to the grand surroundings. "Popcorn in half an hour," following it up with a shouted *"Rock!"* and then "Shee-it" in a playful "Ren And Stimpy" voice. These are not the actions of a man having a bad time.

"Planet Telex" turns out to be the jinxed song of the tour, as the sampler packs up before they even start, so they move straight on to "Morning Bell". It's here



GAUDI, PARDNERS: THE AUDIENCE IN THE TIVOLI THEATRE, BARCELONA

where the electronica influence is most evident, the tight syncopated beats, like double clockwork, build and build to give a sense of emotion and drama. It's hard to pick out exact lyrics in the wide-eyed mood, but the theme is crystal-clear with the heart-stopping "How To Disappear Completely And Never Be Found". Thom's tiny and vulnerable-as-scary-childhood-cartoon sounds ripple around him, applying the tone of "Space Oddity" to a modern stress overload. You can hear Thom fading into the background as he sings this, fulfilling his wish to just be rid of the pain of people, relationships, existence, whatever, and it's like a happy death, one of those cosmic ends where your molecules are scattered throughout the universe. This is the new song you'll cherish most, the masterpiece that fuses the troubled intelligence of old with their newfound euphoria.

"Street Spirit" continues the theme, before they pull an effortless handbrake turn with another new one, "National Anthem". Colin rips into a mean fuzz bassline, Thom yelps and belches into the mic and Jonny takes out what must be the mystical martenot, which looks like a metal box with an antenna on top and has you half expecting a remote-controlled car to dart out from the wings and zip between Thom's legs as he plays. Now this, you'd imagine, would be dark and hard to handle, but its flower-power-tune-gone-bad feel, a bit like the Stones' "We Love You", is actually noise of the thrilling and compelling variety.

It's hits a-go-go after this: "My Iron Lung", joyous, tender in the *"If you're frightened it's OK"* line; "No Surprises", ragged but magical; "Lucky", stretched into infinity; "Exit Music", utterly poignant. They're a perfect prelude to the strangest comedy double act ever. Take it away, Thom and Jonny!

"Stockhausen played here the other night!" chirrups Thom. "Tell them your Stockhausen joke, Jonny." A pause, a shake of the fringe. "I don't think it would be appropriate," deadpans Jonny. Huge laugh. Outrageously gigantic laugh, in fact. All of which reminds you of Ed's theory that Thom isn't actually a depressive, he just has a very bleak sense of humour. Either way, the sophisticated Spaniards are rolling around.

Time for another new one: "Knives Out", introduced as being "about cannibalism". And, as you'd expect from a song about munching on human flesh, it swings! There are echoes of "Street Spirit", but with a loose Sixties jangle breathed into its pores, which prompts Jonny to waggle his fringe like he's in Stereolab or something. Very strange. And rather beautiful.

But not as strange and beautiful as "Everything In Its Right Place", which is just *astonishing*. Thom clambers behind the piano while the busy mornentum gets people clapping along and Jonny busies himself with his remote-control box. . . only for shards of Thom's voice to start leaping out from all angles. It seems Jonny's sampling Thom singing things like *"Yesterday, I woke up sucking a lemon"* and then building a frenzied, layered groove out of it, that's just this side of being out of control. And just to emphasise the madness of it all, Thom comes to sit on the edge of the stage, letting his voice ricochet around him, feeling and feeding off the chaos, until it all becomes too much and he leaps off the stage and runs up the red carpet in the middle of the stalls, slapping hands in a flash on his way out. Cue hysteria, everyone on their feet, and the kind of cheering last heard when the lions were presented with their Sunday lunch.

One final new song before the brilliance of "Paranoid Android". "Egyptian Song" sees Colin haul out a double-bass and Thom hammering two piano chords, but it still ain't jazz. It's actually an epic-feel exploration in four-dimensional space again, the sound of a band realising that, as long as you have the confidence and belief to slip gravity and soar over the rules, you can do absolutely anything. Even have a good time.

AFTERWARDS, everyone – but everyone – is on a high. Nathalie and Julie from Perpignan in France just say "amazing" over and over, adding that "it was very hard to stay seated. We wanted to get up and jump." Steve Lamacq reckons he hasn't "seen Radiohead enjoy themselves so much for a long time. I was expecting something more bleak." And, calm and happy at the aftershow party, Phil Selway seems pretty pleased too.

'ENJOYING OURSELVES IS THE MAIN THING WITH THIS TOUR' – PHIL

"Enjoying ourselves is the main thing with this tour," he nods. "The last bit of touring with 'OK Computer', we became very po-faced and possibly a bit precious and we wanted to get beyond that. It should be the best experience ever, really. We wanted to get back that excitement of playing. Maybe everything's not polished, but there's a real conviction to what we're doing."

How do you think the new songs went down?

"They seemed to fit in pretty well. It's still getting there. We're in a good position, in that nobody knows what they sound like. We could be playing any old pile of tripe! But I'm not embarrassed to play them. They fit in well with the rest of the set."

Are the songs more dark?

"No. I'd say they're more energetic than 'OK Computer'. There's an intensity to it. That comes from the abrasive, relentless aspect of it. We felt very relaxed about these shows. We used to be in a position where if we made a mistake, it'd be *(Pulls stormy face)*. Now we're not so uptight."

How does the new album compare to the others?

"It's more concise. There's a real energy to it. It has a very late-night feel. It's the only way I can describe it."

Was it a difficult record to make?

"Yeah it was. We were going in so many different directions and ironing out problems that we hadn't had time to address before. It wasn't fractious, though. We've become a lot more honest with each other. If anything, we got a lot closer than we've ever been. Everything's on a more realistic footing."

So it's a new start, a clean slate?

"Yeah, that's it."

The tickets for the tent tour went on sale last Saturday. Pray there's some left. You won't want to miss this one for the world.

RADIOHEAD PLAY LONDON ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL ON JULY 1. THEIR UK TOUR STARTS IN NEWPORT ON SEPTEMBER 1. SEE GIG GUIDE

THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF ROB FROM MAJORCA

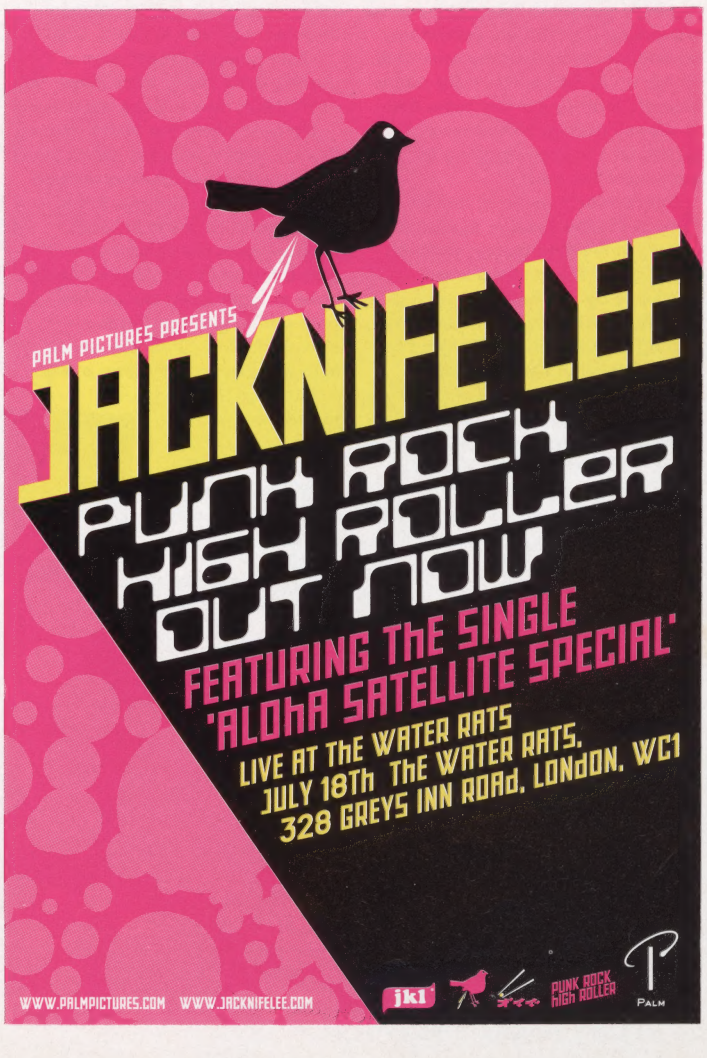
4.40 "My ticket got stolen. A kid grabbed my wallet from a bar table, so I'm trying to get a replacement. I work in a chip shop in Majorca and got the ferry over on my own. They're the best band in the world."

6.40 "I saw Phil earlier and he said he'd see what he could do. He was in a rush though, so I'm not holding out any hope. Maybe there'll be some returns."

9.40 No sign of Rob outside, even though we've managed to get him a ticket. Poor lad. He seemed pretty gutted. As you would be.

9.55 He's in! "I managed to get a return, but even so, Phil sent a roadie out with a ticket as well, so that just goes to show what great lads they are. I'm really chuffed. I can't believe I'm in!"

11.30 "It was fantastic! Absolutely amazing!"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